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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades there has been an upsurge in ethnic nationalism not only in the recently decolonized world, but also in many of the industrialized countries of Europe and North America. Two major ethnic-nationalist movements in North America have been the separatist movement in Quebec and the civil rights movement in the Southern United States. Some recent theories suggest such movements develop in opposition to state encroachment in ethnic affairs. Yet, unlike Quebec, the movement in the South has favored state intervention. Comparative analysis shows both movements were based in distinct labor markets, matured with post-World War II industrialization, and mobilized on the basis of certain social characteristics, but the key to the different attitudes toward the state seems to be the degree of regional political and economic cooptation of which the state is capable. (Author/IS)

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ETHNIC-NATIONALISM IN NORTH AMERICA: SOME COMPARATIVE FEATURES

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Abstract

Two major ethnic-nationalist movements in North America have been the separatist movement in Quebec and the civil rights movement in the US South. Some recent theories suggest such movements develop in opposition to state encroachment in ethnic affairs. Yet unlike in Quebec, the movement in the South has favored state intervention. Comparative analysis shows both movements were based in distinct labor markets, matured with post-World War II industrialization, and mobilized on the basis of certain social diacritica; but the key to the different attitudes toward the state seems to be the degree of regional political and economic cooptation of which the state is capable.

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BACKGROUND TO ETHNIC-NATIONALISM STUDIES

Margaret Mead, Geoffrey Gorer, and others were among the first anthropologists to study national culture and national character, a trend which apparently was conditioned by the requirements of psychological warfare during World War Two. According to Margaret Mead (1953: 642) this trend in nationality studies became entrenched in anthropology due to the "exigencies of the post-1939 world political situation" and which continued into the Cold War period.

But after World War Two the general decolonization process also shifted the focus of national development and international conflict to Asia and Africa. Correspondingly, the research activity of social scientists in the post-war period also changed. The war-time and cold war objective of conducting national character studies for propaganda, morale-boosting, and occupation government purposes gave way to studies of nation-building processes in the former colonial world.

However in the past two decades there has also been an upsurge in ethnic-nationalism in many of the industrialized countries of Europe and North America; indeed, there is probably a link between the world decolonization process and the resurgence of ethnic-nationalism in not only Western Europe but also in Canada and the United States. One thing which decolonization and the opening up of new markets stimulated was economic expansion in former reserve areas of these industrial states (for example, in the United States south and in French-Canada), and in this process the social and political order in these areas has in every instance been called into question by the inhabitants

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themselves.

LABOR MARKETS AND MULTI-NATIONAL STATES

If the western industrial countries were each fully integrated nation-states, one would expect no ethnic-nationalist upsurges in these developing regions. However, as Hechter (1971, 1975, 1976) has suggested, the historical basis for ethnic-nationalist movements is the co-existence of different nationalities within each state. He defined this relationship as "internal colonialism" as manifested in a cultural (ethnic) division of labor within the bounds of the state.

Let me reframe this theory in political-economic terms. First, history suggests that nations as a form of social community are a product of the rise of the capitalist mode of production. Second, capital is itself not so much money or machines as it is a social relationship between people who buy and sell labor power in order to carry on commodity production. Third, the historical tendency has been for these multiple social transactions to become differentiated and integrated in the form of separate markets, ultimately meaning separate labor markets. And finally, corresponding to the market activity in different territories there emerged unifying national languages of social intercourse, overarching nation-states and national codes of law, and national forms of consciousness and culture.

In these terms, the composition of certain European and North American countries (notably the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States) could actually be best described as multinational state formation. The so-called regional parts of these

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state systems originally consisted of separate labor markets with distinct national attributes. Through civil wars and annexations, political hegemony was in each case extended by one nation over another.

For capital today, these differences between labor markets are still of great importance, for the periodic development of these reserve areas is of great use in competing on the world market. But it is also precisely in relation to state policies designed to exploit and maintain these market differences that ethnic-nationalist movements have developed in the post-war West.

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE STATE

But it should be understood that ethnic-national movements today are not reactions against such modernization (cf. Eisenstadt 1966), nor are they necessarily organized on the basis of traditional ethnic values and institutions (cf. DeVos 1975). In fact, nationalists are often modernizers themselves as well as unabashed manipulators of modern socio-political institutions in pursuing their goals (Fox et al. 1978: 115-118).

Current theories emphasize the post World War Two expansion of the authority of centralized "welfare states" into the domains of power-brokering ethnic leaders has elicited elite attempts to resist this encroachment by formulating their particular interests as general ethnic-nationalist objectives and then by mobilizing the population in their own defense (Fox et al. 1978:118-121).

However, few ethnic-nationalist movements are homogenously anti-state in their orientation. For example, in an internal colonial market there may be little ethnic opposition to state

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policies which facilitate industrialization so long as a more equitable social distribution of wealth appears forthcoming. But if state policies promise to restrict the nationality's share in the economic product, then the conditions exist for a nationalist movement with an anti-state orientation (Brass 1976: 227-235).

I suggest that the objective basis for an ethnic-nationalist movement in a multi-national state today is the existence of an internal colonial labor market whose status is called into question by industrialization; the subjective character of the movement depends on the extent of contradiction or conformity between ethnic-nationalist demands and state policies regarding the redistribution of wealth. Typically, the struggles for linguistic, educational, cultural and political rights are the arenas in which this most basic issue is fought out.

ETHNIC-NATIONALISM IN QUEBEC AND THE SOUTH

My final remarks concern the study of ethnic-nationalist movements in North America. Studies of ethnic-nationalism by anthropologists have largely been confined in the industrialized world to Western Europe. So let me begin to ask whether the dynamics of ethnic-nationalism have also been reflected in social movements in Quebec and the U.S. South during the past twenty years, i.e., in the Civil Rights Movement and in the Quebec nationalist movement.

Post-war industrialization has dramatically transformed life in both regions. This is reflected demographically in the massive population shift from rural agricultural, mining and forestry areas to industrializing cities. In fact it is only relative-

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ly recently that Montreal has become the center of a flourishing "national" culture in Quebec (Jacobs 1980: 10-25), or that Atlanta has become known as the financial "capital" of the South.

Southern segregation laws, which defined an historically distinct labor market, limited the possibilities for absorbing both black and white sharecroppers in a single industrial system. In response there arose the southern Civil Rights movement which effectively represented the interests of black and white labor against these socio-political restrictions. Eventually the federal state gave support to the movement in the interests of capital investment as well as for international reasons (Truman 1948). This coincidence of the interests of mainly Northern capital and southern labor gave this nationalistic Southern movement a pro-state appearance and gave federal policies a pro-Civil Rights appearance. However, the subsequent implementation of Taft-Hartley "right-to-work" laws has maintained the South as a distinct labor market within the United States, so the objective basis for Southern nationalist mobilization remains.

In Quebec post-war industrialization was less hampered, but to the extent that the use of the French language in industry and commerce was privately discouraged and restricted, this limited the integration and advancement of Quebecers in urban/industrial life. The economics of nationalism subsequently found political expression in the issue of French language rights, and led to the 1969 election of a federal administration headed by a Quebecer, Pierre Elliot Trudeau. But despite broad Quebec support, the Liberal Party policy did nothing to fundamentally alter the differential operation of the labor market in Quebec or the

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unequal distribution of industrial wealth. Although the province is one of the richest in resources in Canada, the population remains one of the poorest (Todd 1977: 29) and the one most reliant on federal revenue sharing and support. The persistence of these inequalities despite the election of a Quebec-backed federal government generated and has since 1977 sustained a nationalist and separatist provincial government.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

What I have argued here is that the differential existence and maintenance of labor markets within Western states provides the objective -- that is, necessary but not sufficient -- basis for the development of ethnic-nationalist movements. Only in the post-war period were the possibilities for a major expansion of world commodity production and exchange (due to decolonization of world markets) so great as to cause these former reserve areas in the major countries to be rapidly industrialized.

It has been in the course of this industrialization that the subjective identity of "regional" populations as "nationalities" has shown signs of maturing. However, modern ethnic-nationalist movements have expressed a range of programmatic objectives which appear to vary in accordance with the perceived conformity or contradiction of state policy with the interests of each nationality. But so long as the differential operation of labor markets is maintained, no amount of cooptive activity on the part of the state can eliminate the potential for the further development of ethnic-nationalist movements in the West.

Finally, one of the traditional subjects of anthropology has

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been the analysis of social relations fundamental to the different forms of community which have appeared in human history. In this historical period of national forms of society, the most fundamental social relationship is that between capital and labor, a relationship which lies at the heart of national distinctions themselves. This appears to be true not only in Western Europe but also in North America, and the study of social movements in Quebec and the South could add to our understanding of the origins of and solutions to national inequality.

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